

TITLE TO CERTAIN REAL ESTATE IN THE DISTRICT OF  
COLUMBIA.

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JANUARY 16, 1897.—Committed to the Committee of the Whole House and ordered to  
be printed.

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MR. SHANNON, from the Committee on the District of Columbia, sub-  
mitted the following

REPORT.

[To accompany H. R. 4279.]

The Committee on the District of Columbia, to whom was referred the bill (H. R. 4279) to cure the title to certain real estate in the District of Columbia, submit the following report:

In accordance with the provisions of the act of Congress of July 10, 1790, three commissioners were appointed by the President to lay out the city of Washington, and in 1791, in consideration of the great benefit they expected to derive from having the Federal city upon their lands, the original proprietors donated to the United States certain lots in each square.

The first mention found in the records of the square referred to in H. R. 4279 is under the date of December 3, 1793. It is there designated as bounded by certain streets and squares. The lots in this square were not then numbered, but by a verbal agreement made afterward certain portions of the square were to be donated to the United States by the proprietors. In 1809 this agreement was carried into effect, and the square numbered 996 was then for the first time subdivided into lots, and among those donated and assigned to the United States were the two lots mentioned in this bill, numbered 7 and 8.

This is the first clear record we have of these lots, and here we find them assigned to the United States.

In October, 1871, George W. Watson purchased these lots after having had the records carefully searched, and after being furnished with an abstract of title certifying that the same was good and sufficient. Three years later, in 1874, he learned for the first time that there was a possibility that his title to the lots was not good, since an entry had been found in some of the earlier records, showing that the lots had been assigned to the United States in 1809.

Another more careful investigation of the records was then made, and the title was easily traced back to 1822, showing that the owner of the lots at that time was William Prout, one of the original proprietors. Continuing the search, nothing further was found till, under the date of August 4, 1809, it was discovered that the same William Prout had assigned these lots to the United States.

Thus it appears that William Prout first assigned these lots to the United States in 1809, and again assigned them to other parties in 1822; that the lots have remained ever since in the hands of private parties,

having been sold and transferred again and again, the parties in possession continuing to pay taxes on them to the Government down to the present time, a period of seventy-five years, and that the United States have never asserted any title whatever to the property and do not to-day. The published reports of the Government officials in charge of the public grounds do not include square 996 among the properties enumerated as belonging to the United States.

The only reasonable explanation of the discrepancy in the earlier records regarding the title of these lots is that they were reassigned by the United States to William Prout some time after 1809, and before 1822, when, as stated, he assigned them a second time; and as it is a well authenticated fact that many of the records of titles in the District of Columbia were destroyed by fire about the year 1814, it need not be surprising that positive proof of such reassignment is wanting. Such records as do exist, however, of that early period in the history of the city, show clearly that there were many reassignments of lots between the original proprietors and the Government before the final division of the squares and lots was arranged to the mutual satisfaction of both parties.

In view of the peculiar facts surrounding this case the committee are unanimously of the opinion that the relief asked for in this bill should be granted. In their judgment the facts that the purchase of these lots was undoubtedly made in perfect good faith; that improvements have been made upon them; that taxes have been paid upon them to the United States for a continuous period of seventy-five years, and that this long possession and occupancy by the purchasers was never questioned or opposed, constitute considerations of sufficient merit to justify the passage of the measure.

The committee therefore recommend the passage of H. R. 4279 with the following amendments:

Strike out all of the preamble that follows after the title down to line 1.

In line 3 substitute in place of the words "quitclaims and releases" the words "quitclaim and release."